For The 21st Century Muslim



Real Life Lessons From The Holy Qur'an

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"Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: 'We believe,' and will not be tested?"

(29:2)

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Introduction to the Book

All praise belongs to Allâh, we praise Him, and we seek His forgiveness. Whosoever Allâh guides then there is none who can misguide him and whosoever Allâh leaves astray there is none who can guide him.

As Muslims we consider this life to be a test for the Hereafter, when giving worldly tests the first thing we do is that we cover the syllabus for the test, however when giving the test of our life we fail to cover the syllabus for the test, and that syllabus is the Noble Qur'an. This book is intended to do just that, i.e., to give the Muslims of the 21st century their syllabus for life in the form of life lessons from the Noble Qur'an. A word of caution here, this book is in no way, shape or form intended to be an alternative to reading the Qur'an, but in fact this book is arranged in a format that encourages further reading and study of the Qur'an.

Allâh says in the Qur'an:

> (This is) a Book (the Qur'an) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember. (38:29)

This Verse summarizes my inspiration for writing this book and in this book I will provide over a hundred lessons for life derived from the Qur'an for the 21st century Muslim, I will have succeeded in my effort if this book helps Muslims understand their religion better and hence become better Muslims.

The lessons in this book are meant to be powerful words of advice to Muslims who find themselves at a certain situation in

their lives, the direct words of advice from Allâh are quoted by quoting the Qur'an, and I provide an interpretation and an explanation to make it easier for the modern day Muslim to understand and use this advice practically.

Structure of This Book

This book is divided into 5 chapters, and each chapter consists of several related life lessons derived from the Noble Qur'an. These lessons are meant to be as concise as possible, and at the same time as inspiring and helpful to the reader as possible.

At a time when Muslims think twice before looking into the Qur'an for answers to their problems, I hope that this book of relevant life lessons from the Qur'an (that I was in immense need of during my teen years) will allow the Muslims of the 21st century to recognize the greatness of this miracle from God, and prevent them from making the same mistakes that I made during my life.

I pray that Allâh accepts this work from me and forgives me for any mistakes that may be present in this book, and I also pray that this book helps Muslims to come out of their 'days of ignorance'.

Muhammad Bilal Lakhani,
Riyadh,
Saudi Arabia

What to Do?

- What to Do when Life is Good?
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What to Do when Life is Good?

Allâh says in the Qur'an:

"We give to men by turns," (3:140)

This Verse confirms what we all learn about life as we get older. That our fortunes in this life are cyclic, i.e., if one day we are doing well for ourselves, the next day we may not be so well off. In this lesson I want to discuss what a Muslim should do if his or her life is going well as we should always fear that Allâh might transfer our good fortunes to another if we become ungrateful of the bounties that Allâh has blessed us with.

As a Muslim when one is doing well religiously, financially, healthwise and in relationships with his family and friends, he can be considered to be having a good time in life. So what does a Muslim in this position do in order to maintain this position in life and to maximize the use of this position in order to benefit him in the Hereafter?

Well for a starter, he has got to realize that this success in life is because of Allâh's guidance and His blessings on him, he must also understand that he has been blessed either because his deeds have been righteous or because Allâh is taking a trial of him. Allâh says in the Qur'an:

> *"To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. He enlarges provision for whom He wills, and straitens it for whom He wills. Verily He is the All-Knower of everything."* (42:12)

What this means is that instead of letting your worldly success get to your head and singing praises about your business abilities, what you really have to do is to see this worldly success in light of an additional responsibility, which is to make the most of this worldly success for your salvation in the

Hereafter. This Verse also tells us something that a lot of us refuse to pay heed to much to our own detriment and that is that your wealth and provision is something that is in the Hands of Allâh and Allâh alone, and so it is much more beneficial to us if we, for example, ask Allâh sincerely and passionately for an increase in our wealth rather then spend endless hours networking and entertaining people in power in order to get potential favors that may or may not increase our wealth. The important point here being that we should depend solely on Allâh for our provisions and not on our 'contacts' or friends, for who can be a better friend to have in times of need than the Lord of the worlds Himself? Furthermore, if we remember Allâh when our fortunes in life are good then it is more likely that Allâh will remember us when our fortunes aren't that good and we ask Him for help.

Once a Muslim realizes that all his success is due to Allâh's guidance and blessings, he has got to thank Allâh for His guidance and blessings. The best way to thank Allâh is by praising and by worshipping Him, especially by prostrating to Him. By thanking Him in this manner you are also benefiting yourself as now Allâh will increase His blessings on you as Allâh says in the Qur'an:

> *"And He listens to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness and gives them* **increase of His Bounty**: *but for the disbelievers there is a terrible penalty."* (42:26)

Last Word:

It is also very important not to get corrupted or get used to this success in life, for Allâh will test us by taking some of it away and since this life is only temporary, we should not regret that. Instead we should use this success as a motivating factor to increase our worship so that we can live with this much ease in the Hereafter which is in fact our permanent abode. And no

matter how successful we get in this life, we must remember what is making us this successful and not lose track of our religion, as Allâh says in the Qur'an:

"If Allâh were to enlarge the provision for His servants they would indeed transgress beyond all bounds through the earth..." (42:27)

What to Do when Life is Not as Good?

"Whatever good (O man!) happens to you is from Allâh, but whatever evil happens to you is from your (own) soul. And We have sent you as a Messenger to (instruct) mankind: and enough is Allâh for a witness." (4:79)

It may not be very easy to see immediately the brilliance of the message in this Verse from Allâh to us, but as I put this Verse into context later in this page, the meaning of the Verse is going to become clear very quickly. But first I would like to take a moment to describe certain points in a Muslim's life where his faith in Allâh is tested when some of the luxuries of this life are taken away from him. For example Allâh may test a person's faith by making Islam look like something that is holding the person back from riches, or good relationships with friends. Or Allâh may take away the person's health and wealth and see if the person is still a good Muslim under trying circumstances. The golden rule therefore is that any time a Muslim is under distress, his faith is being tested by Allâh. Thus whenever you find yourself struggling in life, remember this golden rule, this is a test from Allâh, so don't fail in it by abandoning your religion for the sake of worldly pleasure, and remember that you are going to be rewarded for being patient when being tested, as according to a *Sahih Hadith* the Prophet ﷺ said:

"By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, no believer is stricken with fatigue, exhaustion, worry or grief, but Allâh will forgive

> *him for some of his sins thereby—even a thorn which pricks him.*" (Ahmad 2:303, Sahih Hadith)

So, whenever you find yourself being tested, remember that you are being rewarded at the same time. Now before we try to find solutions to the problems in our lives, we must understand the real causes of the problems in our lives and according to the Verse I quoted on the previous page, "whatever evil happens to you is from your (own) soul", so what does this mean. This means that all the problems in our lives are of our own creation. And what action of ours creates these problems?

The answer is our sins. This can be proven using the following *Hadith,* Imam Ahmad recorded that 'Aishah said that Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

> "*If a person commits many sins and has nothing that will expiate for them, Allah will test him with some grief that will expiate for them.*" (Ahmad, Sahih Hadith)

So all our problems in this life are due to the sins we commit. This may be a little tough to swallow initially, so I want you to look deep into your life and find examples in your life that prove this statement, at first it was tough for me to accept this fact too, but upon further study I was able to find a direct link between the problems in my life and the sins that I have committed.

Now we know what is the root cause of all the problems in our lives, so what is the solution? Simple—yet not known to many Muslims, what I am about to tell you now has the potential to solve all your life's problems. The two-part solution to all your life's problems is given below:

- Sincerely ask for forgiveness for all the sins that you have committed and make a pledge to mend your ways, i.e., not to commit sins anymore as much as possible.
- Increase the time and the quality of your worship.

However, there is a message of hope for those being tested and going through a rough time in life, the following *Surah* was revealed to the Prophet ﷺ when he was going through a rough time in his life:

1 By The Glorious Morning Light,

2 And by the Night when it is still,

3 **The guardian-Lord has not forsaken you nor is He displeased.**

4 **And verily the Hereafter will be better for you than the present.**

5 **And soon will your Guardian-Lord give you (that wherewith) you shall be well-pleased.**

6 Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter (and care)?

7 And He found you wandering and He gave you guidance.

8 And He found you in need and made you independent.

9 Therefore treat not the orphan with harshness,

10 Nor repulse the petitioner (unheard);

11 But the Bounty of your Lord—rehearse and proclaim!

(Surat Ad-Duha, 93)

When being tested a Muslim does feel as if Allâh has forsaken him. In the 3rd Verse (in bold) Allâh tells the believer that this is not true. And Allâh promises that soon 'you shall be well-pleased'.

Last Word:

When being tested by Allâh, remember to be patient and hang in there with Paradise as a motivation to struggle through the hardships of life without losing your faith. And remember that

the solution to all the problems in this life is to reduce your sins, to repent and to increase your good deeds. When in need of a morale boost start doing *Dhikr* of Allâh, reading the Qur'an, and also take a look at the 'compilation of uplifting Verses from the Qur'an (coming later in this chapter) to help you through rough times in life'.

What to Do when Allâh begins to Test Your Faith by Taking away Your Wealth and Your Health?

> "Verily, We sent (Messengers) to many nations before you (O Muhammad ﷺ). And We seized them with extreme poverty (or loss in wealth) and loss in health (with calamities) so that they might humble themselves (believe with humility)." (6:42)

It is a well-known fact that Allâh tests the faith of Muslims by taking away their health and their wealth or by threatening to take it away, but as seen in the Verse above, if a Muslim does pass the test, his faith will be stronger then it was at the beginning of the test. The first thing I would like to go over with you on this topic is everyday examples of how Allâh makes us choose between our faith and our wealth and how more often than not we make the wrong decision.

The testing begins at a young age, you give the grocer a 5-riyal note and he gives you change from a 10. You make a split second decision to keep it or to leave it. As you grow older you are forced to choose between taking and giving interest in your dealings with the bank and other institutions and so it continues. Here is a sample of the questions that appear on the test of life, consider this a cheat sheet, but just make sure you know the answer by the time the question comes up in your life:

Q1. Should I take simple interest on my savings account?

Q2. Should I apply for a **non-Muslim** country's citizenship just so that I can be better off financially?

Q3. Should I just make this small bet with my friends (I won't take the money from them if I win)?

Q4. It won't hurt him if I don't tell him a certain fact about my product (the fact doesn't really matter that much)?

I could go on, but I think you get the point by now. Make sure you know that the answer to all these questions **is an emphatic "no", remember also that when Allâh says that He is going to test the believers with a fear of poverty, He actually means what He says. Also remember that the fact that the test is hard to pass and requires real sacrifices does not constitute a valid excuse for failing it, because by definition this test is hard to pass and requires real sacrifices and tough decisions to be made.**

Last Word:

Allâh will test your faith throughout your life using your wealth and your health. Be prepared to be tested, be patient when tested, and remember that our fortunes in this life are cyclic and take life to be a roller coaster, the fact that you are at the bottom today also means that you're already on your way up.

A Compilation of Uplifting Verses from the Qur'an to Help You through Rough Times in Life

Well this is what the headline suggests it is. When Muslims are going through rough times in their lives they get through by doing anything from listening to soothing music, to listening to the recitation of Qur'an, or by fasting and praying. I wanted to

add another choice on the list, and that is a 'A compilation of uplifting Verses from the Qur'an to help you through rough times in life'. You can read this to be inspired by Allâh Himself during rough times as these are direct quotations from the Qur'an to help you through rough times.

Surat Ash-Sharh (Inspirational words in bold):

1. Have We not opened your breast for you (O Muhammad ﷺ)?
2. And removed from you your burden,
3. Which weighed down your back?
4. And have We not raised you high in fame?
5. **Verily, along with every hardship is relief,**
6. **Verily, along with every hardship is relief (i.e., there is one hardship with two reliefs, so one hardship cannot overcome two reliefs)**
7. So when you have finished (your occupation), devote yourself for Allâh's worship.
8. And to your Lord (Alone) turn (all your) intentions and hopes. (94:1-8)

Surat Al-Hijr (Motivation for not losing faith during testing times):

45. The righteous (will be) amid Gardens and fountains (of clear-flowing water).
46. (Their greeting will be): "Enter you here in Peace and Security."
47. And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury: (they will be) brothers (joyfully) facing each other on thrones (of dignity).
48. There no sense of fatigue shall touch them nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave.
49. Tell My servants that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful; (15:45-49)

Surat Al-Baqarah (Allâh tests you because he knows you can handle the affliction):

"...No person shall have a burden laid on him greater than he can bear." (2:233)

Surat Al-Baqarah (It's all part of the test, just make sure you don't give up because help is on its way):

"Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden (of Bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried: 'When (will come) the help of Allâh?' Ah! verily, the help of Allâh is (always) near." (2:214)

Surat Al-Ankabut (Can anybody hear me, this is a test, this is only a test):

2. *Do men think that they will be left alone on saying "We believe" and that they will not be tested?*
3. *We did test those before them and Allâh will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.*

(29:2-3)

What to Do when You see Yourself acting on Shaitan's Desires?

"And if an evil whisper comes to you from Shaitan, then seek refuge with Allâh. Verily, He is All-Hearer, the All-Knower.

Verily, those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious), when an evil thought comes to them from Shaitan, they remember (Allâh) and (indeed) they then see (aright)." (7:200, 201)

In order to stop somebody from controlling your life you must understand how the person operates. I will tell you this in

detail when I take you 'inside Shaitan's head' (if he has one) later on in the book, but right now I would like to give you a behind the scenes view of Shaitan's operation.

Shaitan knows that he can't make a Muslim commit major sins at will, so he starts by telling us to commit smaller sins, until our resistance to these sins drops. Then he tells us to commit a bigger sin, which in fact looks like a small sin at the time, Shaitan continues this until we start committing major sins. Shaitan works by causing us to doubt our beliefs and makes us either too negligent or too over zealous about our religion, depending on what's easier for him. If you are or have been experiencing any of the following thoughts, then Shaitan has made good headway in your body and you have begun to act on his desires:

- I'll start praying in the mosque 5 times a day after I finish my exams – or even worse – after I come back from my summer vacation.
- I can afford to miss *Fajr* in the mosque today, (I went yesterday).
- I'll pray right after this TV program finishes. (You just choose a bunch of actors over God).
- This isn't a lie/it won't hurt anyone/it's only a joke/I'll just do it this one time only.

Again I could have gone on but I think you get the point by now. So now if you find yourself as a pawn in Shaitan's game, what are you to do? Well, the answer to that question is in the Verses quoted before:

> "And if an evil whisper comes to you from Shaitan, then seek refuge with Allâh.." (7:200)

When you get that feeling, that tinge, that push from Shaitan telling you to do something wrong that seems fun or easy at the

time but deep inside you know it's wrong for you to do, the first thing you must do is go straight to the part of the house where you keep the Qur'an, or go to a mosque, get hold of a copy of the Qur'an and start reciting the Qur'an as much as you can until you are able to exert some sort of control over the desires created by Shaitan.

Tip of a Lifetime:

One way in which you can seek refuge with Allâh from Shaitan is by reciting the last two chapters of the Noble Qur'an—namely *Surat Al-Falaq* and *Surat An-Nas.*

Last Word:

Shaitan works in mysterious ways and so to combat him we must do what Allâh says in plenty of places in the Qur'an, and that it is to seek refuge with Allâh by remembering Him, i.e., by doing *Dhikr* of Allâh, and one of the best ways of doing *Dhikr* is by reading the Qur'an and praying and fasting voluntarily.

Getting Into Paradise... A Step-by-Step Plan

- The Dynamics of the Plan
- Compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Paradise
- A Written Contract between You and God
- Explanation of the Articles in the Contract
- A fully-filled Sample Contract
- The Personalized Road to Success
- Unbelievably Easy Ways to get into Paradise that would make Shaitan cry

The Dynamics of the Plan

> *"As to those who believe and work righteousness, verily, We shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed.*
>
> *For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade; they will recline therein on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on!"* (18:30, 31)

In this chapter I will introduce a revolutionary step-by-step approach of getting into Paradise. Most Muslims live in the illusion that being Muslim by birth is enough to get a ticket into Paradise. Some Muslims think that praying five times a day gives them the freedom to commit whatever sins they want to commit as they are doing more than most Muslims do today and so some how they have been promised Paradise, and then there are some Muslims who think it's so hard to get into Paradise that they just give up and don't even try, and lastly there are some Muslims who believe that Paradise is 'not worth the effort' required. Whether you belong to one of these groups or not, by the end of this chapter you will be on your very own personalized road to Paradise.

Before setting out on a journey, especially a lifelong journey such as this one, it is absolutely essential to have your goals clearly stated and written. The one and the only goal of a Muslim in this life is:

'To serve Allâh and His religion in order to get into Paradise'

… and not …

'To make a billion dollars before hitting 30 or to become CEO of XYZ, et cetera, etcetera…"

this is the non-Muslim equivalent to the 'purpose of one's life', which non-Muslims try to find by making expensive trips to African safaris, divorcing their wives and marrying younger women, quitting their jobs and buying expensive cars, and it's all considered part of the 'midlife crisis'. For Muslims Allâh has made our job easy by giving us our goal in life upfront.

So that was the good news that we don't need to go searching for the purpose of our creation. The bad news is that it's not easy to meet our goal of getting into Paradise. Some how the Muslims of the 21st century have begun to believe that being a Muslim and getting into Paradise is very easy, and they are severely disappointed and demoralized when they experience hardships on the way to accomplishing their goal. So let me make one thing clear to you right now, right here. **Getting into Paradise is not easy.**

Every single living moment in a Muslim's life is a struggle; a fight to control his desires. I'm going to go as far as to say that if you think it's not a fight for you everyday, and you don't feel that you are sacrificing your own desires for those of Allâh, then you need to take a deeper look at the state of your faith in Allâh and make changes appropriately. This point is made best by the following Verse from the Qur'an:

> *"Is he who is on a clear proof from his Lord, like those for whom their evil deeds that they do are* ***beautified*** *for them, while they follow their own lusts (evil desires)?"* (47:14)

So, how is our step-by-step plan coming along so far, well for starters we have a clear written goal that tells us what we are fighting for, and we have recognized that our journey is not going to be easy.

Now you may have seen me use words like 'journey' and 'fighting' a couple of times in this chapter, and that is because getting into Paradise is a journey. And the younger you are,

the longer the journey is going to be; however, you never know when your car will crash, so you must be awake and fighting at all times during the journey, even when young.

Remember getting into Paradise is a full-time job, and the work you do to earn money for your living is part of that job, never let anybody tell you any different. If you treat this goal as secondary to your career goals, then don't be surprised when Allāh does not enjoy your sense of priorities and you end up not enjoying the Hereafter.

For a long journey like this—your car is your dedication, and your petrol is your motivation. By the end of this chapter not only will you have signed a written contract confirming your dedication, but you will have learnt ways to fuel your dedication, by being highly motivated to your cause.

You can get into Paradise by either reducing your sins or increasing your good deeds. This plan calls for the systematic elimination of all sins from your life by first attacking the major sins in your life and coming up with 'Best Alternative Deeds' or BAD (more on this later in the chapter).

This plan also calls for a gradual increase in the quality and quantity of one's good deeds. You will have to get a pen and paper out very soon because we will be identifying your greatest sins and finding solutions and BADs to them.

But first, for any plan to succeed, the individual at hand must be sufficiently motivated so that he does not fall off the plan when he begins to encounter hardships. For this plan the motivation for your hard work is the reward waiting for you in the Hereafter, i.e., Paradise.

And so on the next pages you will find a compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Paradise, that should be read repeatedly along with the translation of the rest of the Qur'an when you find yourself facing hardships along the way. Once you are highly

motivated, it is essential for you to be committed and dedicated to the plan, and in order to do this I'm going to make you sign a renewable one year contract between you and Allâh (on page 34), complete with a mission statement, contractual obligations and punitive damages for failing to meet your obligations. As a result you will now have a written commitment to Allâh and penalties for not fulfilling your commitments.

Once the written commitment is in place and you are sufficiently motivated, we will move on to the implementation stage of the plan, where you will not only learn some of the easiest ways to get into Paradise that will make Shaitan's eyes roll in anger, but you will also learn how to maximize on smaller good deeds.

Last Word:

The goal of a Muslim in this life is to be a servant to Allâh, period. The meaning of the word Islam is to 'surrender'. This is in reference to the fact that Muslims are supposed to surrender their desires for those of Allâh's. This is an absolutely essential concept to understand for a Muslim. He must not put his success in this life higher in priority than his religious obligation to follow Allâh's orders.

The purpose of our life on earth is not enjoyment for us, but subservience towards Allâh. Our real enjoyment is being saved up for the Hereafter, so don't go in the vain search for self-fulfillment by indulging yourself in illegal pleasures here on earth. Remember Islam is the only 'way of life' in which a person 'can have it all', just not all of it at the same time. Imagine how sad it is to make a million dollars in daytime and have a car crash at night and spend the rest of your life in Hell. Islam makes sure that doesn't happen to you unless you make it happen by turning your back on Allâh.

Compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Paradise

There will be times in your life when you will want to get off this plan, or when you will fall off your plan. All you need to do at these times in your lives is that you need to re-energize your motivation. This compilation and the compilation describing Hell later in the book will help you do this. So here is what you are fighting for, in the words of the One and the Only Lord of all mankind:

Surat Ar-Rahman **(taking you inside Paradise for the next two minutes):**

46 But for such as fear the time when they will stand before (the Judgment Seat of) their Lord, there will be two Gardens—

47 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

48 Containing all kinds (of trees and delights).

49 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

50 In them (each) will be two Springs flowing (free);

51 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

52 In them will be Fruits of every kind two and two.

53 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

54 They will recline on Carpets, whose inner linings will be of rich brocade, the Fruit of the Gardens will be near (and easy of reach).

55 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

56 In them will be (Maidens), Chaste restraining their glances, whom no man or jinn before them has touched,—

57 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

58 Like unto rubies and coral.

59 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

60 Is there any Reward for Good other than Good?

61 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

62 And besides these two there are two other Gardens,—

63 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

64 Dark green in color (from plentiful watering).

65 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

66 In them (each) will be two springs pouring forth water in continuous abundance:

67 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

68 In them will be Fruits, and dates and pomegranates:

69 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

70 In them will be fair (companions), good, beautiful;—

71 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

72 Companions restrained (as to their glances) in (goodly) pavilions;—

73 Then which of the favor of your Lord will you deny?

74 Whom no man or Jinn before them has touched;—

75 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

76 Reclining on green Cushions and rich Carpets of beauty.

77 Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?

78 Blessed is the Name of your Lord full of Majesty, Bounty and Honor.

(55:46-78)

Surat As-Saffat (Think about this before you think of sinning…):

40 But the sincere (and devoted) servants of Allâh,–

41 For them is a Sustenance determined,

42 Fruits (delights) and they (shall enjoy) honor and dignity,

43 In Gardens of Felicity,

44 Facing each other on Thrones (of dignity).

45 Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear-flowing fountain,

46 Crystal white of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof),

47 Free from headiness, nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom.

48 And beside them will be chaste women; restraining their glances with big eyes (of wonder and beauty).

49 As if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded.

(37:40-49)

A Written Contract between You and God

Introduction:

This is the secret weapon that is going to go a long way in giving you the willpower boost you need in order to commit to your goal of getting into Paradise. Just go through the contract quickly at first and don't worry if you don't understand something. Each article will be explained in detail on page 36, and you can also read a sample form on page 39, after which you will be capable of filling a contract for yourself. So without any further delay, here it is:

The Contract

Mission Statement: I ______________________ _ am signing this contract as a means to help me fulfill the purpose of my life, which is to act in servitude of Allâh purely and sincerely to gain His pleasure and hence gain admittance into Paradise.

Article 1: Gradual reduction of sins

Section 1: (Selection)

(i) The three greatest sins that I am committing in my life are

1. ______________________________________,
2. ______________________ ___________________and
3. ______________________________________.

(ii) I will immediately stop committing the following sin ______________________________ from the list above, and I will work to gradually eliminate the other two of my greatest sins over the period of the year.

Section 2: (Abating)

(i) My Best Alternative Deeds (B.A.D.) are:

1. _______ ______________________________ _______,
2. ______________________________ __________and
3. _______ ______________________________

(ii) I promise to repent for the sins that I have committed and that I will happen to commit in the future in many ways and especially by saying '*Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi*' and '*Subhan-Allâhil-Azim*' 100 times every day before/after I offer my ______________________. prayer everyday.

Article 2: Gradual increment of good deeds

Section 1: (Replacement)

(i) I plan to start doing the following two major good deeds in my life daily:

1.____and

2.____.

(ii) By the end of the year I plan to be doing the following **three** 'shortcut-to-Paradise' deeds:

1.____,

2.____ and

3.____.

Article 3: The punitive damage clause

Section 1: (Penalty)

(i) In the unlikely event that I am not able to fulfill any of my contractual obligations in this contract by the end of the year, in addition to seeking repentance from Allâh, I will impose the following three penalties on myself:

1.____,

2.____ and

3.____.

Article 4: The Qur'an clause

Section 1: (Recitation)

(i) I ______________________ plan to finish reciting the Qur'an with the translation every month/3/6/9/12 months beginning on the date of the signing of the contract.

(ii) I plan to recite the Qur'an for 10/15/20 minutes everyday, and I will try to read it most probably in the following time slot: __:__ __ to __:__ __.

Article 5: Sealing the Deal:

Starting today (Date:___/___/_____) to one year from now (Date:___/___/_____), I ____________________ will *In sha' Allâh* try my best to honor all the commitments that I have made in this contract and I will also try my best to uphold the honor of Islam and Muslims everywhere.

Signature: ______________________________. (Good Luck)

Explanation of the Articles in the Contract:

I'll be talking you through all the articles in the contract so that you can fill one up for yourself, if you are still confused after reading this then go on to the 'fully-filled sample contract', that should clear up any doubts.

Article 1, Section 1:

(i) Simply list the three greatest sins you are committing in your life. If you are not fulfilling one of the pillars of Islam make sure you mention that in this list. The order in which you list the sins is not important.

(ii) Mention the sin that you can stop committing immediately, your choice should be a compromise between how easy it is for you to stop it and how great the sin is. For the other two sins you will eliminate them gradually over the period of the year.

Section 2:

(i) Here you have to list three of your Best Alternative Deeds (B.A.D.). This is something that you will never have heard before, and it has no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah. But basically

this is a replacement sin for your greater sins. For example if you can give up drugs if you start smoking then smoking is your 'Best Alternative Deed'. But that doesn't change the fact that smoking is a sin as signified by the abbreviation (B.A.D). It is just a lesser sin than drugs. This **(B.A.D) concept has to be used with extreme caution and you must have a plan in place to gradually eliminate the B.A.D. itself, for example if you have started smoking to give up drugs, then you must also have a plan to give up smoking gradually and eventually you must bring yourself into a position where your alternative to sin is a good deed itself. The only purpose of this plan is to help you save yourself from the vicious cycle of sins that Shaitan often manages to put us in.**

(ii) This clause has been put here so that you may seek repentance for your sins. The following *Hadith* backs the merit of saying '*Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi*' and '*Subhan-Allâhil-Azim*' 100 times every day':

Narrated Abu Hurairah ﷺ: The Prophet ﷺ said,

> '(There are) two words (expressions or sayings) that are dear to the Most Beneficent (Allâh) and very easy for the tongue to say, but very heavy in the Balance. These are: '**Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi**' and '**Subhan-Allâhil-Azim**'.' (Sahih Bukhari, 9/652)

Now encircle your choice, i.e., before or after, and mention the prayer, for example '*Isha*' when you would like to do this. The reason I'm being so specific about the prayer, is so that you can form a habit and not forget this *Dhikr*.

Article 2, Section 1:

(i) List any two major good deeds that you can start committing daily, for example you can start praying if you don't.

(ii) Choose any from page 44 onwards; the explanation is also given there.

Article 3, Section 1:

List any three penalties that you can impose on yourself upon not being able to fulfill any of your obligations in the contract. These can be anything from giving away a certain amount of money to charity, or to promise to observe a voluntary fast, etc. However, if you fear that you will not fill out this contract due to this article, then leave out this article for this year, maybe next year you can work up the guts to put your money where your mouth is.

Point To Ponder: I know many of you will hesitate to use the contract because of this penalty clause, for the fact that we fear the penalties that we will impose on ourselves. But why then do we not fear the penalties that Allâh will impose on us when we fail to complete our commitments to Him.

Article 4, Section 1:

(i) and (ii) are pretty straightforward clauses, just encircle your choices and fill in the blanks. The reason I'm asking you for specific time commitments is because we all 'plan' to do a lot of stuff, but it is only when we write down our plans with specific time frames for accomplishing them, and penalties for not accomplishing them, then only do we succeed in converting our plans into reality.

Article 5:

Again this is pretty straightforward, fill in your name, the date today and the date one year from now, and put your signature.

A Word of Caution:

This contract is not derived from the Qur'an or the Sunnah and it is not a part of Islam. It is purely a document meant for those people who keep on planning to do great things in regard to their religion and never actually get around to doing anything.

This contract will help them to commit specific times in the day for converting their plans into reality. People who are about to go onto diets or voluntary fitness programs that require a high level of self-restraint are made to sign similar documents, but as far as Islam is concerned the signing of this contract is not necessary to make you a good Muslim, and the signing of this contract does not automatically make you a better Muslim than one who does not sign this contract.

A fully-filled Sample Contract

Sample contract filled for an average young male Muslim in the 21st century:

Article 1: Gradual reduction of Sins

Section 1:

The three greatest sins that I am committing in my life are

1. Not praying five times a day,
2. Addicted to indecent images/videos on the net, and
3. Smoking/drug abuse.

(ii) I will immediately stop committing the following sin 'Not praying five times a day' from the list above, and I will work to gradually eliminate the other two of my greatest sins over the period of the year.

Section 2:

(i) My Best Alternative Deeds (B.A.D.) are:

1. Listening to music,
2. Watching excessive amounts of satellite TV, and
3. Smoking (if one has a severe drug abuse problem).

(ii) I promise to repent for the sins that I have committed and that I will happen to commit in the future, by among other things saying '*Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi*' and '*Subhan-Allâhil-Azim*' 100 times every day before/after I read my *'Asr* prayer everyday.

Article 2: Gradual increment of good deeds

Section 1:

(i) I plan to start doing the following two major good deeds in my life daily:

'praying five times a day', and

'going to the mosque to pray 5 times a day'.

(ii) By the end of the year, I plan to be doing the following three 'shortcut-to-Paradise' deeds:

1, 2, 3. Choose any from the list on page 44.

Article 3: The punitive damage clause

Section 1:

(i) In the unlikely event that I am not able to fulfill any of my contractual obligations in this contract by the end of the year, in addition to seeking repentance from Allâh, I will impose the following three penalties on myself:

1. Giving away 500 riyals in charity,
2. Praying 10 *Nafl Rak'ahs* of prayer, and
3. Doing *Itikaf* in the last ten days of Ramadan.

Article 4: The Qur'an clause

Section 1:

(i) I ______ ____________ plan to finish reciting the Qur'an with translation every month/3/6/9/12 months beginning on the date of the signing of the contract.

(ii) I plan to recite the Qur'an everyday for 10/**15**/20 minutes, and I will try to read it most probably in the following time slot: 21:00 to 21:15.

Article 5: Sealing the Deal

Starting today (Date: 01/01/05) to one year from now (Date: 01/01/06), I ____________________ will *In sha' Allâh* try my best to honor all the commitments that I have made in this contract and I will also try my best to uphold the honor of Islam and Muslims everywhere.

Signature: ______________ ______________. (Good Luck)

The Personalized Road to Success

So how far have we come in our step-by-step plan by now? We are now highly motivated individuals with specific written contractual obligations to help us achieve our goals. So what lies between you and Paradise now?

Answer: Shaitan.

Proof:

> "And let not Shaitan hinder you (from the right religion, i.e., Islamic Monotheism). Verily, he (Shaitan) to you is a plain enemy." (43:62)

And how does Shaitan hinder you?

Answer: By slowly melting your faith and crushing your willpower.

So what's the difference between people of Paradise and people of Hell?

Answer: Willpower.

The following is an excerpt from an article that I wrote about willpower, this was not an Islamic article, but an article meant to boost morale in times of hardships:

The Difference between Success and Failure

Question: What is the difference between the successful people and the not so successful people in this world?

Answer: The difference is that successful people have the willpower to accomplish what they set out to do regardless of what hardships they face while achieving their objective. These people are inspired from within to accomplish whatever they set their mind to. The people who fail in life are those who are either too afraid of failure to commit themselves fully to a goal, or are just plain lazy to dream, let alone put everything on the line to accomplish that dream. Don't believe me that the entire balance of success and failure in life is that easy to explain, well then here are the words of two men, the first one being one of the most successful men to walk on earth:

> "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to success is more important than any other one thing".
>
> Abraham Lincoln

> **"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."**
>
> Vincent T. Lombardi

When I thought that I had gotten a rough deal in life, I blamed everything in the world except myself for it. When I realized however that doing that changed nothing for me, that's when it hit me. The difference between me and Bill Gates is not because

he was born smart. It was because he chose to do something with his life, and he had the willpower to see it through. The question now is:

Question: What is the difference between success and failure in life?

Answer: WILLPOWER.

There it is right in front of you, what stands between you and everything you ever wanted, be it a million dollars before you hit 30, or a promotion before the end of the year" (or in this case getting into Paradise). "**If you have the willpower to do something then you can get it done no matter what you have to go through to get it**."

Point to Ponder:

Looking back at this article that I wrote quite a long time back when my priorities in life were slightly different, I felt empty when I read " Don't believe me that the entire balance of success and failure in life is that easy to explain, well then here are the words of two men, the first one being one of the most successful men to walk on earth:" And then I quoted Abraham Lincoln, and I realize now that that's the best that non-Muslims can look up to; successful people in this life, and that made me feel so shallow because these people as successful as they are, they aren't perfect. Unlike what Allâh has appointed as our role model, i.e., the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who is a perfect creation by all means, and that's when the importance of a role model hit me. And maybe, just maybe that is why the Muslim nation is in as bad shape as it is today, i.e., because it stopped using Allâh's appointed role model and started taking movie, music and sports stars sometimes not even from Muslim countries as role models. But don't just think about it, do something about it!

So, now you know the importance of willpower. And where is a Muslim supposed to derive his willpower from? From his faith in Allâh – the stronger our faith the stronger our willpower, and hence the more likely we are to get into Paradise. Here are some simple ways (but by no means all the ways) to increase your faith in Allâh:

1. Increase your *Dhikr* of Allâh. You can do this by reading the Qur'an, by praying voluntarily, et cetera, etcetera.
2. Increase your good deeds, the big ones and the little ones.
3. Decrease your sins, and repent for your previous sins.

Once equipped with strong willpower, implementation is not a problem. What to implement is in your contract and some of the details follow next.

Shortcuts to Paradise

Each shortcut stated below guarantees Paradise if followed properly:

Shortcut # 1:

Allâh says in the Qur'an:

> *"If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e., Paradise)."* (4:31)

So if we avoid the great sins, we can get into Paradise with ease. So what are these great sins, well most of them are listed in the *Hadith* below, so avoid them and other known great sins and get into Paradise:

The Prophet ﷺ said,

"Avoid the seven great destructive sins." They (the people) asked, "O Allâh's Messenger! What are they?" He said, "To join partners in worship with Allâh, to practice sorcery; to kill the life which Allâh has forbidden except for a just cause (according to Islamic law); to eat up usury (Riba), to eat up the property of an orphan, to give one's back to the enemy and fleeing from the battlefield at the time of fighting and to accuse chaste women who never even think of anything touching chastity and are good believers." (Sahih Bukhari)

N.B: The proofs for the following shortcuts are found in *Ahadith,* but these have not been quoted here for the sake of conciseness and clarity.

Shortcut # 2:

Reading *Ayatul-Kursi* (*Surat Al-Baqarah,* Verse no. 255) after every obligatory (or *Fard*) prayer.

Shortcut # 3:

Offering two *Rak'at Nafl* prayer after every time you perform *Wudu'*.

Shortcut # 4:

Offering the *'Asr* and *Fajr* prayers positively in the mosque with congregation.

Shortcut # 5:

Saying *'La hawla wa la quwata illa billah'* repeatedly during the day and night.

Shortcut # 6:

Saying *'Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi'* and *'Subhan-Allâhil-Azim'* repeatedly during the day and night.

Shortcut # 7:

Offering the 4 *Rak'at Sunnah* prayer before offering the *Fard Zuhr* prayer.

Shortcut # 8:

Performing *Hajj* that is accepted by Allâh, i.e., *Hajj Mabrur*.

Shortcut # 9:

Answering the *Adhan* whenever you hear it.

Point To Ponder:

After reading all these incredibly easy ways of getting into Paradise you must have realized by now that Allâh is trying to make it easier for us to get into Paradise, and not harder. So the only thing stopping us from getting into Paradise is we ourselves.

Isn't it?

A Word of Caution:

Although the *Ahadith* where these shortcuts have been derived from, clearly state that you may get into Paradise by following these shortcuts, the final decision rests with Allâh and so I can take no personal responsibility for you getting into/not getting into Paradise by following these shortcuts. And remember that following these shortcuts does not give you a free hand to commit sins (especially in connection with shortcut no. 1), or to stop committing other good deeds. Remember on the Day of Judgment you will be rewarded and punished based on all your actions in this life, not just some selected actions. And Allâh is always fair in His Judgment.

Last Word:

The best way to use these shortcuts to carve your own way into Paradise is to start by introducing one shortcut a month into your daily life, while making sure that you are following shortcut no. 1. You can begin with some of the easy shortcuts such as shortcut nos. 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8. But whatever you do, don't lose these golden opportunities to get into Paradise. I'll leave you now with some more shortcuts to help you through this life and the Hereafter, and end with some of the special qualities of the people of Paradise.

Shortcut for Seeking Forgiveness for Your Sins:

Saying *'Subhan-Allâhi wa bihamdihi'* and *'Subhan-Allâhil-Azim'* 100 times a day.

Shortcut for Avoiding Punishment in the Grave:

Reciting *Surat Al-Mulk* (*Surah* no. 67, Verse no. 1-30) in the morning and in the evening, for example after your *Fajr* and *Maghrib* prayers.

Shortcut for Staying Out of Hell:

Saying *"Allâhumma ajarni minan-nar"* 7 times after finishing your obligatory (or *Fard*) *Fajr* and *Maghrib* prayers.

Shortcut to Take People into Paradise with You:

Memorizing the entire Qur'an by heart.

Qualities of the People in Paradise:

1. Those who fear Allâh when they are alone.
2. Those who have a forgiving heart.
3. Those who have good ties with their relatives and treat their neighbors with due respect and good manners.

A Foolproof Method for Staying Out of Hell

- Inside Shaitan's Head
- Shaitan's Weapons of Mass Destruction
- How to Stop Shaitan in His Tracks
- Compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Hell
- Mastering the Art of Repentance
- Some Inspiring Words of Advice

"Such is the punishment (in this life), but truly, the punishment of the Hereafter is *greater*, if they but knew." (68:33)

Inside Shaitan's Head

> "(Iblees) said: 'By Your Might, **then I will surely mislead them all,'"** (38:82)

This Verse on its own does a good job of convincing us that Shaitan is an open enemy to us, who is bent on taking us to Hell with him. So what is it that we have to do to stay out of Hell?—Well, we have to look at how Shaitan controls us and then try to come up with effective methods to diminish and eventually eliminate his control over us. But before we can do anything else we must understand the origins and the creation of Shaitan, and so that's what were going to begin with, here is the story of the creation of Shaitan in the Words of Allâh Almighty Himself:

> (Remember) when your Lord said to the angels: "Truly, I am going to create man from clay.
>
> So when I have fashioned him and breathed into him (his) soul created by Me, then you fall down prostrate to him."
>
> So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them:
>
> Except Iblees, he was proud and was one of the disbelievers.
>
> (Allâh) said: "O Iblees! What prevents you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with Both My Hands. Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the high exalted?"
>
> (Iblees) said: "I am better than he. You created me from fire, and You created him from clay."
>
> (Allâh) said: "Then get out from here, for verily, you are outcast
>
> "And verily!, My Curse is on you till the Day of Recompense."
>
> (Iblees) said: "My Lord! Give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are resurrected."

(Allâh) said: "Verily! You are of those allowed respite

"Till the Day of the time appointed."

(Iblees) said: "By Your Might, then I will surely mislead them all,

"Except Your chosen slaves amongst them (faithful, obedient, true believers of Islamic Monotheism)."

(Allâh) said: "The Truth is—and the Truth I say,—

That I will fill Hell with you (Iblees) and those of them (mankind) that follow you, together."

(38:71-85)

Now you know how Shaitan was created, so how does he work, how does he make us a victim of our own desires (or hormones as they call them these days). As seen from the story above the mission statement of his life is to take as many of us as possible to Hell. But how does he go about doing this, well to explain that to you I'm going to quote myself from earlier in the book:

"Shaitan knows that he can't make a Muslim commit major sins at will, so he starts by telling us to commit smaller sins, until our resistance to these sins drops. Then he tells us to commit a bigger sin, which in fact looks like a small sin at the time, Shaitan continues this until we start committing major sins. Shaitan works by causing us to doubt our beliefs and makes us either too negligent or too over zealous about our religion, depending on what's easier for him."

The best way Shaitan can help us on our way to Hell is by making it easier for us to commit sins. Any good Muslim with a decent amount of faith will always try to justify his sins, and this is where Shaitan steps in, he gives us what seem to be very valid justifications for committing sin at the time. Now what I've done to combat this is that I've made a list of Shaitan's most vicious justifications in the form of a list termed 'Shaitan's

weapons of mass destruction' which is basically a list of thoughts Shaitan makes you think to get you to commit sins. So now if you ever catch yourself thinking one of these thoughts, you will know that Shaitan has you in his arms, and now without a further delay here they are:

Shaitan's Weapons of Mass Destruction

- These are the years that I can enjoy myself, I have all my life in front of me to worship Allâh.
- **I am young, I can afford to commit these sins now, I can always ask for forgiveness later.** (These words spell D-E-A-T-H, nuclear style to your faith)
- If everybody is doing it, it can't be that sinful.
- But I've been doing it all my life I can't just stop now.
- **Just this one time, I'll never do it again, I promise.**
- Life is to be short to be living it like a good Muslim, I can do some of this and some of that and manage somehow.
- This is not how a teenager should be living his life, **I'm wasting my life**, I haven't lived my life because I have been a good Muslim all this time.
- **I'm missing out on the best years of my life.**

And finally after a couple of years the death blow:

- **I don't care!** (Very few make it back after this)

Many of these are things that ordinary people tell good Muslims in order to encourage them to commit sins. (But I am not saying that people who tell you this are Shaitan, don't try to pull their hair off or something to check.)

Last Word:

Shaitan is an open and sworn enemy of Muslims, and if one is going to fight an enemy it is absolutely essential to understand the tactics which Shaitan is going to use to fight you, as this will give you the upper edge when you are locked in a fight over your desires. Shaitan attacks Muslims at every stage of their faith, when they are negligent, he keeps them negligent, when they are perfect he makes them proud. Shaitan uses tactics ranging from making you look for excuses and reasons not to do certain good deeds, he even uses laziness as a weapon. To get you to do evil he makes the evil seem so pleasurable that it becomes extremely hard to resist. He makes the forbidden seem lawful, and the lawful seem forbidden.

How to Stop Shaitan in His Tracks

> *"So when you want to recite the Qur'an, seek refuge with Allâh from Shaitan, the outcast (the cursed one).*
>
> ***Verily! He has no power over those who believe and put their trust only in their Lord (Allâh).***
>
> *His power is only over those who obey and follow him (Shaitan), and those who join partners with Him (Allâh) (i.e. those who are Mushrikun -polytheists."*
>
> (16:98-100)

This topic has been dealt with in great detail in 'What to do when you see yourself acting on Shaitan's desires' in chapter 1. But to summarize for you in one line what you have to do in order to stop Shaitan in his tracks I'm going to quote the following Verse from the Qur'an:

> *"And if an evil whisper comes to you from Shaitan, then seek refuge with Allâh..."* (7:200)

Question: And how do you seek refuge with Allâh?

Answer: You do that by, among other things, doing *Dhikr* of Allâh, praying, reciting the Qur'an et cetera etcetera. Make sure you read page 23 for more information on this topic and make sure you don't miss the *Tip of a Lifetime* on that page.

What I really want to do in this chapter is to help you gain control over Shaitan, and what better way to do that than to teach you how to deal with Shaitan's weapons of mass destruction. In the following article that I wrote to help myself when I was being bombarded by this weapon of his, I focus my attention on weapon no. 2, i.e., I am young, I can afford to commit these sins now, I can always ask for forgiveness later, but reading this article will also help you with many of the other WMDs. Make sure you don't just passively read this article, but that you are able to identify with the article in your own experiences in life, so that you become immune to this weapon of Shaitan, and now here is the article (I have made some changes in the article to fit it into context in this book):

How to deal with the "**I am young, I can afford to commit these sins now, I can always ask for forgiveness later**" attitude.

Allâh created desires to test mankind, these desires were then made super attractive by making them as easy as the proverbial 'click of the button', and obviously pleasurable beyond doubt. **But any Muslim with a decent amount of faith always knows when he is committing a sin, however, he will always try to justify it somehow.** Before I continue further let me just make it clear; there is no justification for any sin whatsoever no matter how easily it may seem justifiable at the time. Now when a young Muslim especially a teenager who thinks that nothing can harm him at the moment is confronted with a desire such as the one I've described above, he will feel uncomfortable at the beginning having to choose between his desire and Allâh, and will look for any solution to his dilemma

to return to a state of comfort, Shaitan at this point will immediately enter the following thought in the person's mind in order to return him to a state of comfort: *I am young, I can afford to commit these sins now, I can always ask for forgiveness later.*

The most famous example of this thought comes to my mind from that of the Pharaoh of Egypt, he thought he could get away with all his sins by repenting just before he dies, and we all know how he died (by the way it is documented in the Qur'an that he tried to repent while he was drowning).

Now let me take a wild guess at what you are thinking (or what Shaitan is making you think), *I'm not the Pharaoh, I haven't committed such great sins, I'm not that old, I'm not going to drown in the sea, I'm going to repent much before I die and I will be forgiven.*

Well guess what...

The Pharaoh probably thought much of the same thoughts, whether you believe it or not, the facts speak for themselves.

So we know that this attitude is severely flawed, and most Muslims who have this 'I am young...' attitude know that it is flawed, so how do we bring about a change in this attitude?

The only way to do this is to show you the consequences or shall I say the consequence of this attitude; Hell. You can read the detailed description of Hell on the following pages, but even that is not enough to convince people to give up this attitude. What you must remember though is that whenever this thought enters your mind, you must immediately become aware of what's happening and start a self-debate within yourself and produce arguments that allow you to reject or defuse this weapon of Shaitan.

I'm going to end our focus on Shaitan in this part of the book by quoting the last *Surah* of the Qur'an, in which we are told to seek refuge with Allâh from the evil whispers of Shaitan:

Say: "**I seek refuge with (Allâh)** the Lord of mankind,

"The King of mankind,

"The Ilah (God) of mankind,

"**From the evil of the whisperer** (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one's heart after one remembers Allâh),

"Who whispers in the breasts of mankind,

"Of Jinns and men."

(14:1-6)

Compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Hell

"Allâh has promised the hypocrites; men and women, and the disbelievers, the Fire of Hell, therein shall they abide. It will suffice them. Allâh has cursed them and for them is the lasting torment." (9:68)

This compilation has been made for only one reason, and that is to literally scare you to death about dying as a sinner. After reading this compilation, you will have a clear picture of Hell in your mind, and if you've just committed a sin recently, reading the following Verses will send chills down your spine.

(It will be said.) "This is the Day of Judgment which you used to deny."

(It will be said to the angels:) "Assemble those who did wrong, together with their companions (from the devils) and what they used to worship.

"Instead of Allâh, and lead them on to the way of **flaming** Fire (Hell);

(37:21-23)

On the Day when that (Al Kanz: money, gold and silver, etc., the Zakat of which has not been paid) will be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be **branded** their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs (and it will be said unto them):-"This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard." (9:35)

On the Day when the torment (Hell-fire) shall cover them from above them and from underneath their feet, and it will be said: "**Taste what you used to do.**" (29:55)

Truly, **Hell is a place of ambush**—

A dwelling place for the Taghun (those who transgress the boundary limits set by Allâh like polytheists, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allâh, hyprocrites, sinners, criminals, etc.),

They will abide therein for ages.

Nothing cool shall they taste therein, nor any drink.

Except boiling water, and dirty wound discharges—

An exact recompense (according to their evil crimes).

For verily, they used not to look for a reckoning.

(78:21-27)

And the true promise (Day of Resurrection) shall draw near (of fulfillment). Then (when mankind is resurrected from their graves), **you shall see the eyes of the disbelievers fixedly stare in horror**. (They will say): "Woe to us! We were indeed heedless of this; nay, but we were Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers, etc.)."

Certainly! You (disbelievers) and that which you are worshipping now besides Allâh, are (but) **fuel for Hell!** (Surely), you will enter it.

Had these (idols, etc.) been aliha (gods), they would not have entered there (Hell), and all of them will abide therein.

*Therein **breathing out with deep sighs and roaring** will be their portion, and therein they will hear not.*

Verily those for whom the good has preceded from Us, they will be removed far therefrom (Hell) (e.g. 'Esa, son of Maryam; Uzair, etc.).

They shall not hear the slightest sound of it (Hell), while they abide in that which their ownselves desire

***The greatest terror** (on the Day of Resurrection) will not grieve them, and the angels will meet them, (with the greeting): "This is your Day which you were promised."*

(21:97-103)

Mastering the Art of Repentance

Say: "O 'Ibadee (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allâh, verily Allâh forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

"And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith (Islamic Monotheism) to your Lord and submit to Him (in Islam), before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped. (39:53-54)

Repentance is **Allâh's greatest gift** to a Muslim, and I m going to explain this gift using a series of questions and answers that follow below:

Question: What do Muslims need to seek repentance for?

Answer: **Muslims need to seek repentance *<u>not only</u>* for the sins that they have committed, but also for the religious obligations they have missed.**

Question: Are there any conditions which have to be fulfilled in order for my repentance to be accepted?

Answer: Yes, three conditions have to be met in order for a Muslim to repent:

- The Muslim must sincerely regret committing the act which he is repenting for.
- The Muslim must immediately stop committing that act.
- He must also promise not to commit that sin ever again, and stick to the promise.

Proof:

> Allâh accepts only the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and foolishness and repent soon afterwards; it is they to whom Allâh will forgive and Allâh is Ever All-Knower, All-Wise.
>
> And of no effect is the repentance of those who continue to do evil deeds until death faces one of them and he says: "Now I repent;" nor of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful torment.
>
> (4:17,18)

Question: What if some other human being has been wronged when I was committing the sin?

Answer: In this case the Muslim must ask for forgiveness from the person he has wronged and then seek Allâh's forgiveness.

Some Inspiring Words of Advice

All actions of every man in the past, present and the future can be traced down to two basic emotions: *pain and pleasure.* Look at the people around you and look at yourself, the only reason you do absolutely anything in life is in order to avoid potential pain or to achieve potential pleasure. This is why you go to work in the morning, and this is why you close your eyes

in a sandstorm. Now in context of this have you ever asked yourself the following question:

Do you want to be a good Muslim in order to avoid going to Hell <u>*OR*</u> in order to go into Paradise?

It is very hard to be a good Muslim these days, not only non-Muslims, but Muslims are encouraging you to do sins, therefore if one is to stay on the course throughout his life, it is absolutely essential that he be highly motivated, and this is where the question above comes into play. The question above contains **the two motivations for virtually every action we do** in our lives not only as a Muslim but as a human being. So why am I asking you to choose between the two? Because one emotion is stronger than the other.

When I asked myself this very question, I was unable to decide immediately because for being a good Muslim, Allâh has promised us not only the potential of avoiding pain but also the potential for pleasure, as seen by the Verses that follow:

> *As for those who believe (in the Oneness of Allâh—Islamic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, for them are Gardens (Paradise) as an entertainment, for what they used to do.* (32:17, 19)

> *Theirs will be a bed of Hell (Fire), and over them coverings (of Hell-fire). Thus do We recompense the Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers, etc.).* (7:41)

Then I began to ponder over my own life experiences, and asked 'Am I more motivated to do work when I'm in fear of pain, or do I work harder when there is a potential for pleasure afterwards' and **every time the answer came out that I work better when I'm in fear of pain.** So what does all this mean and how can it help me get where I want in the Hereafter?

Well what this means is that potential pain is a stronger motivator than potential pleasure for me, and now I can use

this fact when I go through life having to choose between my desires and that potential pain. For example if I have a chance to take interest on my bank account I will not take it because I fear the "bed of Hell (Fire)" (from the Verse above).

Now I want you to figure out your own motivator by digging into your life experiences, it doesn't have to be potential for pain, it could be the potential for pleasure that brings out the best in you, but it is absolutely essential for you to work this out.

Once you know the stronger motivator for you, you can control Shaitan from the palm of your hand, if he tempts you to do anything, motivate yourself not to do it by reminding yourself of the motivator, for example if you are motivated by the fear of pain then read the compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Hell. And if you are motivated by the potential for pleasure then read the compilation of Qur'anic Verses describing Paradise. Doing this alone should cut the levels of you falling for his temptations.

Now I'm going to finish off this chapter by a case study of a 17-year-old boy struggling to make sense of his life in terms of his faith, you will see lots of your own struggles reflected in this story, and the reason I'm writing this is to let you know that it happens to all of us, remember this piece of advice; **it's not very easy to be a good Muslim in this day and age, so be prepared for a hard fight and don't be disheartened by the challenges you face.**

> Ali is a 17-year-old boy. He is a religious boy from a religious family, and does truly fear Allâh in his heart, however, he has seen how much fun it can be to be just a regular teenager in his friends, but he knows that if he becomes one he won't be half as religious as he is now. He wants to do both things at the same time as he does not want to 'miss out' on his teenage life, however this is simply not possible in this day and age and he must choose one way over the

other. But any Muslim with faith in his heart can never willfully choose a life of sin over worship, and so without his own knowledge he begins to develop a split personality due to his indecision. Slowly and slowly Shaitan begins to make him break very minor boundaries, very soon he begins to commit slightly bigger sins which he wouldn't even have dreamt of committing just a couple of months back.

He still prays five times a day, but whenever he enters the mosque he feels empty because he can't find a justification for his sins. He can't take this discomfort anymore.

Shaitan goes for the kill.

His mind is set ablaze with calls of: **I don't care**!

Finally his mind has been set free.

He goes further and faster in sins then any of his friends would ever dream of going. He still prays five times a day, his family and friends have no idea of what is going on, Ali has developed two characters; one for the day and one for the night. Whenever his inner voice asks him to explain himself, his response is **I don't care**!

But Ali is a very smart boy, now a year has passed since this process has begun. He realizes that every minute he is spending 'acting Muslim' in front of his family is a moment he is wasting. He could be having fun at the time. He knows he won't go to Paradise, he knows whatever fun he wants to have, he must have it in this life. He realizes that every minute he spends stuck in the traffic, waiting in line in the school cafeteria is a waste of his time, he could be having fun instead. He thinks he is 'missing out' again. This was the very feeling that brought him here in the first place.

But he does not have time to resolve this dilemma, he only has time for fun right now. Until he had a chance to fly in an aeroplane for the first time since this process began. The newspapers are handed out in the plane, the headline reads:

'Plane crash leaves 245 dead'. His plane begins to move.

He feels like the ground beneath him has been snatched away from him.

> He grabs on to the side handles of the seat as the plane takes off. He is afraid, what will happen to him if his plane crashes. What if his plane was the one that crashed? He does not let his guard down until the plane lands. He resolves to change his ways.
>
> But as soon as he gets off the plane, he forgets everything and continues as normal, until, he gets on the return flight back and then it all begins all over again...

Most Muslims in the world today must have lived through some parts of Ali's story, some maybe among the 245 dead, but you the reader are not, you can still change. That is why I haven't written the ending, I want you to write your own ending. The process of writing the story will be the hardest thing you have ever done, but the ending will truly be 'happily ever after', if the writing has been done well.

Real-Life Lessons from the Story of Prophet Yusuf

- A Short Introduction
- The Story and Its Lessons

We relate unto you (Muhammad ﷺ) the best of stories through Our Revelations unto you, of this Qur'an. And before this (i.e., before the coming of Divine Inspiration to you), you were among those who knew nothing about it (the Qur'an). (12:3)

A Short Introduction

> *"Verily, in Yusuf and his brethren, there were Ayat (proofs, evidences, Verses, __lessons__, signs, revelations, etc.) for those who ask."* (12:7)

The story of Prophet Yusuf ﷺ is one of the most inspiring and lesson-filled stories in the Qur'an. Not only does the story make an interesting read, but it teaches us vital lessons about many of the issues that we face in our lives today, from sibling rivalry (jealousy), to being treated unfairly by people of authority. We see in this story how a Prophet of Allâh deals with these issues, and this story also makes the cut as a very relevant read as it deals with universal issues that are still a problem for Muslims to this day.

Now here is how this chapter is going to work; the story of the Prophet Yusuf ﷺ will be quoted directly from the Qur'an, and I will interrupt at certain points in the story with a 'real-life lesson' or a 'comment' derived from the Verses that preceded my interruption. And now let's begin the story of Prophet Yusuf ﷺ and his eleven brothers:

The Story and Its Lessons

All the Qur'anic Verses below are from *Surat Yusuf*:

> *4. (Remember) when Yusuf said to his father: "O my father! Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon — I saw them prostrating themselves to me."*
>
> *5. He (the father) said: "O my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they arrange a plot against you. Verily! Shaitan is to man an open enemy!*

Real-Life Lesson # 1:

In Verse no. 5, Prophet Yusuf's father (Prophet Yaqub ﷺ) teaches us two things. Firstly he makes us aware of the existence of jealousy, and secondly he teaches us how to avoid jealousy from others, and that is by not showing off your bounties from Allâh or proudly announcing them to the world. He also indicates that jealousy is the work of Shaitan, and that we must avoid Shaitan's traps.

> 6. "Thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of dreams (and other things) and perfect His Favor on you and on the offspring of Yaqub, as He perfected it on your fathers, Ibrahim and Ishaq aforetime! Verily, your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise."

Real-Life Lesson # 2:

Allâh chooses certain people over others to bless with His bounties. The existence of this fact is confirmed in this Verse, we can use this fact in our lives to reduce envy and hatred between ourselves instead of increasing it.

> 8. When they (the brothers) said: "Truly, Yusuf and his brother (Benjamin) are loved more by our father than we, but we are Usbah (a strong group). Really, our father is in a plain error.

Real-Life Lesson # 3:

I can't count how many times I've heard Muslim kids telling me that *'Really, our father is in a plain error'* (of course using a different set of words). So listen to me once right here, your parents do know what's right and what's wrong for you, let your opinion be known, but never disrespect their decision. As you keep reading this story you will understand how costly it can be not to listen to your father. And parents there is a message for you too here: Don't treat your children differently on the basis of gender or age, you will see the potential conesquences of that in the next Verse.

9. "Kill Yusuf or cast him out to some (other) land, so that the favor of your father may be given to you alone, and after that you will be righteous folk (by intending repentance before committing the sin)."

Real-Life Lesson # 4:

In this Verse you see the sons of a Prophet planning to kill their own brother. **That is the power of jealousy.** So whatever you do in life, don't get jealous of others, for the mind stops functioning properly if one is jealous.

10. One from among them said: "Kill not Yusuf, but if you must do something, throw him down to the bottom of a well, he will be picked up bysome caravan of travel ers."

11. They said: "O our father! Why do you not trust us with Yusuf, when we are indeed his well-wishers?"

12. "Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and verily, we will take care of him."

13. He (Yaqub) said: "Truly, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear lest a wolf should devour him, while you are careless of him."

14. They said: "If a wolf devours him, while we are Usbah (a strong group) (to guard him), then surely, we are the losers."

15. So, when they took him away, they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well, and We inspired in him: "Indeed, you shall (one day) inform them of this their affair, when they know (you) not."

16. And they came to their father in the early part of the night weeping.

17. They said: "O our father! We went racing with one another, and left Yusuf by our belongings and a wolf devoured him; but you will never believe us even when we speak the truth."

18. And they brought his shirt stained with false blood. He said: "Nay, but your own selves have made up a tale. So (for me) patience is most fitting. And it is Allâh (Alone) Whose help can be sought against that which you assert."

Real-Life Lesson # 5:

We all go through hard times in our lives, and we cope with it using different methods. So how does a Prophet of Allâh who thinks he has lost his son deal with the pain?

He deals with the pain by being patient. This is a very important lesson for Muslims of this day and age to learn. The Muslim nation as a whole is going through a very rough period; one of the ways to deal with the utter hopelessness that exists in our nation is to be patient and to ask for Allâh's help.

19. And there came a caravan of travelers; they sent their water drawer, and he let down his bucket (into the well). He said: "What good news! Here is a boy." So they hid him as merchandise (a slave). And Allâh was the All-Knower of what they did.

20. And they sold him for a low price,—for a few Dirhams (i.e., for a few silver coins). And they were of those who regarded him insignificant.

21. And he (the man) from Egypt who bought him, said to his wife: "Make his stay comfortable, may be he will profit us or we shall adopt him as a son." Thus did We establish Yusuf in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of events. And Allâh has full power and control over His Affairs, but most of men know not.

Real-Life Lesson # 6:

Allâh works in mysterious ways to bring His blessings to those who stayed truthful to their faith in times of hardship. Who would have thought that a boy thrown in a well in the middle

of the desert would survive, let alone become the finance minister of one of the greatest civilizations of mankind (don't worry we'll get to that part soon)? So the next time you worry about losing a job or a friend because of your faith, remember, '*Allâh has full power and control over His Affairs*' and trust Allâh when He says '*most of men know not*'.

And remind yourself that you are in fact reading the story of a boy thrown in a well left to be forgotten forever that took place over fifteen hundred years ago. Allâh found a way to give even that boy hope, so never lose your hope in Allâh.

> *22. And when he (Yusuf) attained his full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge (the Prophethood), thus We reward the Muhsinun (doers of good).*
>
> *23. And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him (to do an evil act), she closed the doors and said: "Come on, O you." He said: "I seek refuge in Allâh (or Allâh forbid)! Truly, he (your husband) is my master! He made my stay agreeable! (So I will never betray him). Verily, the Zalimun (wrong and evildoers) will never be successful."*

Real-Life Lesson # 7:

In this Verse Allâh teaches us how to deal with the temptations of this life, as when Prophet Yusuf ﷺ is being tempted to commit a sin he says '*I seek refuge in Allâh (or Allâh forbid)!*' So now you know what to say whenever you are tempted by Shaitan to commit a sin.

Real-Life Lesson # 8:

The single largest reason for Muslims today turning into hypocrites and 'western wanna-bes' is the 'success factor' which they associate with one being 'not Muslim'. Allâh categorically rejects that fallacy here when he says '*Verily, the Zalimun (wrong and evil-doers) will never be successful*'. So please

stop acting like you're someone that you're obviously not. Not only does it not look good, but it's not going to get you anywhere in this life or the Hereafter.

> 24. And indeed she did desire him and he would have inclined to her desire, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord. Thus it was, that We might turn away from him evil and illegal sexual intercourse. Surely, he was one of Our chosen, guided slaves.
>
> 25. So they raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back. They both found her lord (i.e., her husband) at the door. She said: "What is the recompense (punishment) for him who intended an evil design against your wife, except that he be put in prison or a painful torment?"
>
> 26. He (Yusuf) said: "It was she that sought to seduce me,"– and a witness of her household bore witness (saying): "If it be that his shirt is torn from the front, then her tale is true and he is a liar!
>
> 27. "But if it be that his shirt is torn from the back, then she has told a lie and he is speaking the truth!"
>
> 28. So when he (her husband) saw his ((Yusuf's) shirt torn at the back; (her husband) said: "Surely, it is a plot of you women! Certainly mighty is your plot!
>
> 29. "O Yusuf! Turn away from this! (O woman!) Ask forgiveness for your sin. Verily, you were of the sinful."
>
> 30. And women in the city said: "The wife of Al-Aziz is seeking to seduce her (slave) young man, indeed she loves him violently; verily, we see her in plain error."
>
> 31. So when she heard of their accusation, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them; she gave each one of them a knife (to cut the foodstuff with), and she said (to Yusuf): "Come out before them." Then, when they saw him, they exalted him (at his beauty) and (in their astonishment)

cut their hands. They said: "How perfect is Allâh (or Allâh forbid)! No man is this! This is none other than a noble angel!"

32. She said: "This is he (the young man) about whom you did blame me (for his love), and I did seek to seduce him, but he refused. And now if he refuses to obey my order, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and will be one of those who are disgraced."

Real-Life Lesson # 9:

Being abused by a person of authority, your desires chasing you to be fulfilled, mindless gossiping by women—sound familiar?

Well this is the story of our lives too isn't it? And now Allâh teaches us how to deal with it by revealing to us a story of a Prophet who faced the same difficulties in life and you will learn how he dealt with them in the pages ahead. So the next time you feel like saying, 'Oh if I lived in the time of the Prophets, it would be very easy to be a good Muslim because I wouldn't have to face the problems that I do today'... think again!

33. He said: "O my Lord! Prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. Unless You turn away their plot from me, I will feel inclined towards them and be one (of those who commit sin and deserve blame or those who do deeds) of the ignorants."

34. So his Lord answered his invocation and turned away from him their plot. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower.

Real-Life Lesson # 10:

In Verse no. 33, Allâh teaches us the Ultimate method of **eliminating sin from our lives**, and that is by avoiding the opportunity to commit sin itself. The Prophet here is willingly asking to be sent to prison, instead of being in a position where

he may be inclined to sin. In Verse no. 34, Allâh gives this method of eliminating sin the thumbs up. So remember to use this piece of advice in your life, always try to avoid an <u>opportunity</u> to commit sin itself, rather than allowing your faith to be tested in the battlefield of your desires.

> *35. Then it appeared to them, after they had seen the proofs (of his innocence) to imprison him for a time.*
>
> *36. And there entered with him two young men in the prison. One of them said: "Verily, I saw myself (in a dream) pressing wine." The other said: "Verily, I saw myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head and birds were eating thereof." (They said): "Inform us of the interpretation of this. Verily, we think you are one of the Muhsinun (doers of good)."*
>
> *37. He said: "No food will come to you (in wakefulness or in dream) as your provision, but I will inform (in wakefulness) its interpretation before it (the food) comes. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. Verily, I have abandoned the religion of a people that believe not in Allâh and are disbelievers in the Hereafter (i.e., the Canaanites of Egypt who were polytheists and used to worship sun and other false deities).*

Note: Verses 38-40 have been omitted as they do not relate directly to the flow of the story.

> *41. "O two companions of the prison! As for one of you, he (as a servant) will pour out wine for his lord (king or master) to drink; and as for the other, he will be crucified and birds will eat from his head. Thus is the case judged concerning which you both did inquire."*
>
> *42. And he said to the one whom he knew to be saved: "Mention me to your lord (i.e., your king, so as to get me out of the prison)." But Shaitan made him forget to mention it to his Lord (or Shaitan made Yusuf to forget the remembrance of his Lord—Allâh as to ask for His Help, instead of others). So (Yusuf) stayed in prison a few (more) years.*

Real-Life Lesson # 11:

What is said in Verse no. 42, makes a person who has gone through this worlds trials and troubles go **WOW!**

We all go through problems in our lives, but who do we ask for help?

When you want help in getting a job in a company, you ask a cousin who works there.

When you want anything in general, you ask some one for a favor.

When Prophet Yusuf ﷺ needed help to get out of jail, what did he do?

He asked somebody to help him out instead of asking Allâh: *"(Shaitan made Yusuf to forget the remembrance of his Lord – Allâh as to ask for His Help, instead of others)."*

What was the result of doing that?

> "So (Yusuf) stayed in prison a few (more) years."

I don't need to say anymore.

> 43. And the king (of Egypt) said: "Verily, I saw (in a dream) seven fat cows, whom seven lean ones were devouring; and of seven green ears of-corn, and (seven) others dry. O notables! Explain to me my dream, if it be that you can interpret dreams."
>
> 44. They said: "Mixed up false dreams and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams."
>
> 45. Then the man who was released (one of the two who were in prison), now at length remembered and said: "I will tell you its interpretation, so send me forth."
>
> 46. (He said): "O Yusuf, the man of truth! Explain to us (the dream) of seven fat cows whom seven lean ones were devouring; and of seven green ears of corn, and (seven) others dry, that I may return to the people, and that they may know."

> 47. (Yusuf) said: "For seven consecutive years, you shall sow as usual and that (the harvest) which you reap you shall leave in ears, (all)—except a little of it which you may eat.
>
> 48. "Then will come after that, seven hard (years), which will devour what you have laid by in advance for them, (all)—except a little of that which you have guarded (stored)
>
> 49. "Then thereafter will come a year in which people will have abundant rain and in which they will press (wine and oil)."

Real-Life Lesson # 12:

In the Verses above the cyclic nature of life is established as a confirmed fact, when 7 years of abundance are followed by the seven years of pain. This should help us in our lives as our fortunes in life are also therefore cyclic. So remember Prophet Yusuf's advice for dealing with the cyclic nature of life. Save your wealth in the years of abundance for the years when you will not be as fortunate. And remember after every hardship comes ease.

> 50. And the king said: "Bring him to me." But when the messenger came to him, (Yusuf) said: "Return to your lord and ask him, 'What happened to the women who cut their hands?' Surely, my Lord (Allâh) is Well-Aware of their plot.'
>
> 51. (The King) said (to the women): "What was your affair when you did seek to seduce Yusuf?" The women said: "Allâh forbid! No evil know we against him!" The wife of Al-Aziz said: "Now the truth is manifest (to all), it was I who sought to seduce him, and he is surely of the truthful."

Real-Life Lesson # 13:

In this Verse we are assured by Allâh that truth does always prevail over falsehood no matter how impossible it may seem at a time when one's faith is being tested. So for all of you being tested by Allâh currently, hang in there and remember that truth will prevail no matter what, period.

52. (Then Yusuf said: "I asked for this enquiry) in order that he (Al-Aziz) may know that I betrayed him not in secret. And, verily!Allâh guides not the plot of the betrayers.

53. "And I free not myself (from the blame). Verily, the (human) self is inclined to evil, except when my Lord bestows His Mercy (upon whom He wills). Verily, my Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

Real-Life Lesson # 14:

Allâh informs you in His Own Book here that all humans are inclined to evil and the only ones who escape this inclination are those upon whom Allâh has bestowed His mercy. So how do you become one of those whom He bestows His mercy upon?

By sincerely becoming a faithful believer in your heart and proving it by your actions.

54. And the king said: "Bring him to me that I may attach him to my person." Then, when he spoke to him, he said: "Verily, this day, you are with us high in rank and fully trusted."

Real-Life Lesson # 15:

Who knew that a boy thrown in a well by his own brothers, and then sent to prison when he was innocent, would one day have one of the most powerful men on earth at the time (the king of the Egyptian civilization) say to him: *"Verily, this day, you are with us high in rank and fully trusted."*

That my friends is the Power of Faith in Allâh. So never lose your hope in Allâh's Power no matter how hard things may seem at the moment.

55. (Yusuf) said: "Set me over the storehouses of the land, I will indeed guard them with full knowledge" (as a minister of finance in Egypt, in place of Al-Aziz who was dead at that time).

> 56. Thus did We give full authority to Yusuf in the land, to take possession therein, as when or where he likes. We bestow of Our Mercy on whom We please, and We make not to be lost the reward of Al-Muhsinun (the good doers)

Real-Life Lesson # 16:

What should a good Muslim do to not lose his faith in Allâh when his life begins to fall apart?

He should read this gem of a Verse in which Allâh gives an inspiring and heartwarming message for those who are being tested when He says that *"We make not to be lost the reward of Al-Muhsinun."*

Comment:

After the 7 years of abundance were over, there came 7 years of drought. Prophet Yaqub عليه السلام and the rest of his sons were also affected by this drought, and so now his sons traveled to the capital of Egypt in order to get food rations which were stored during the years of abundance. The person who was responsible for distributing the rations was Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام as he was the finance minister of Egypt at the time.

> 58. And Yusuf's brethren came and they entered unto him, and he recognized them, but they recognized him not.
>
> 59. And when he had furnished them forth with provisions (according to their need), he said: "Bring me a brother of yours from your father; (he meant Benjamin). See you not that I give full measure, and that I am the best of the hosts?
>
> 60. "But if you bring him not to me, there shall be no measure (of corn) for you with me, nor shall you come near me."
>
> 61. They said: "We shall try to get permission (for him) from his father, and verily, we shall do it."

62. And (Yusuf) told his servants to put their money (with which they had bought the corn) into their bags, so that they might know it when they go back to their people, in order that they might come back.

63. So, when they returned to their father, they said: "O our father! No more measure of grain shall we get (unless we take our brother). So send our brother with us, and we shall get our measure and truly we will guard him."

64. He said: "Can I entrust him to you except as I entrusted his brother (Yusuf) to you aforetime? But Allâh is the Best to guard, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy."

65. And when they opened their bags, they found their money had been returned to them. They said: "O our father! What (more) can we desire? This, our money has been returned to us, so we shall get (more) food for our family, and we shall guard our brother and add one more measure of a camels load. This quantity is easy (for the king to give)."

66. He (Yaqub) said: "I will not send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me in Allâh's Name, that you will bring him back to me unless you are yourselves surrounded (by enemies, etc.)," And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said: "Allâh is the Witness over what we have said."

67. And he said: "O my sons! Do not enter by one gate, but enter by different gates, and I cannot avail you against Allâh at all. Verily! The decision rests only with Allâh. In him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him."

Real-Life Lesson # 17:

What happens when people lose their loved ones, especially parents who lose a child?

They begin to question the existence of God and they become very possessive.

Now look at the response of Prophet Yaqub ﷺ who is being asked by the people who killed his son, to let them take his other son with them. His response was: *"The decision rests only with Allâh. In him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him."*

How many of us can say that after losing a loved one?

Remember always that the real test of faith of a Muslim is during times of hardship, not ease.

68. And when they entered according to their father's advice, it did not avail them in the least against (the Will of) Allâh, it was but a need of Yaqub's inner self which he discharged. And verily, he was endowed with knowledge because We had taught him, but most men know not.

69. And when they went in before Yusuf, he betook his brother (Benjamin) to himself and said: "Verily! I am your brother, so grieve not for what they used to do."

70. So when he had furnished them forth with their provisions, he put the (golden) bowl into his brothers bag, then a crier cried: "O you (in) the caravan! Surely, you are thieves!"

71. They, turning towards them, said: "What is it that you have missed?"

72. They said: "We have missed the (golden) bowl of the king and for him who produces it is (the reward of) a camel load; I will be bound by it."

73. They said: "By Allâh! Indeed you know that we came not to make mischief in the land, and we are no thieves!"

74. They (Yusuf's men) said: "What then shall be the penalty of him, if you are (proved to be) liars."

75. They (Yusuf's brothers) said: "The penalty should be that he, in whose bag it is found, should be held for the punishment (of the crime). Thus we punish the Zalimun (wrong-doers, etc.)!"

76. So he (Yusuf) began (the search) in their bags before the bag of his brother. Then he brought it out of his brother's bag. Thus did We plan for Yusuf. He could not take his brother by the law of the king (as a slave), except that Allâh willed it. (So Allâh made the brothers to bind themselves with their way of punishment, i.e., enslaving of a thief.) We raise to degrees whom We please, but over all those endowed with knowledge is the All-Knowing (Allâh).

Real-Life Lesson # 18:

It starts when we are children and we ask our parents why our friend has a bike and we don't. As young adults we wonder why our friends have fancy cars while we take the bus home. And as adults we ask why people less deserving than us earn more than us. Well Allâh answers all those questions using the following words: *"We raise to degrees whom We please."*

77. They (Yusuf's brothers) said: "If he steals, there was a brother of his (Yusuf) who did steal before (him)." But these things did Yusuf keep in himself, revealing not the secrets to them. He said (within himself): "You are in worst case, and Allâh knows best the truth of what you assert!"

Real-Life Lesson # 19:

How many times have people spread malicious lies (or gossip) about you right in front of you but you were powerless to stop them for reasons beyond your control?

And once that happens, how do you mange not to blow your steam off on your wife and kids?

Patience.

I know what you're saying, easier said than done right! Well here is what Prophet Yusuf said to himself to stay patient: *"You are in worst case, and Allâh knows best the truth of what you assert!"*

At least give this phrase a try or two, it does work.

78. They said: "O ruler of the land! Verily, he has an old father (who will grieve for him); so take one of us in his place. Indeed we think that you are one of the Muhsinun (good-doers)."

79. He said: "Allâh forbid, that we should take anyone but him with whom we found our property. Indeed (if we did so), we should be Zalimun (wrongdoers)."

80. So, when they despaired of him, they held a conference in private. The eldest among them said: "Know you not that your father did take an oath from you in Allâh's Name, and before this you did fail in your duty with Yusuf? Therefore, I will not leave this land until my father permits me, or Allâh decides my case (by releasing Benjamin) and He is the Best of the judges.

Real-Life Lesson # 20:

You learn two of the most principal lessons which any Muslim needs to be taught about his religion in Verses 79 and 80. The first lesson is that one must punish the one who commits the crime and not any body who is willing to be punished in lieu of him.

And second, the importance of keeping your word, i.e., not breaking a promise. This lesson goes out to anybody in a position of authority anywhere in the Muslim nation. Please don't break your promise to your people by working for yourself instead of the people.

81. "Return to your father and say, O our father! Verily, your son (Benjamin) has stolen, and we testify not except according to what we know, and we could not know the unseen!

82. "And ask (the people of) the town where we have been, and the caravan in which we returned, and indeed we are telling the truth."

83. He (Yaqub) said: "Nay, but your own selves have beguiled you into something. So patience is most fitting (for me). May be Allâh will bring them (back) all to me. Truly He! Only He is All-Knowing, All-Wise."

Real-Life Lesson # 21:

Now Prophet Yaqub has supposedly lost his second son. How does he deal with it, he deals with it with patience and complete and absolute trust in Allâh that He will make things all right again. So whenever any injustice is done against you in life, you now know what to do to stay sane.

84. And he turned away from them and said: "Alas, my grief for Yusuf!" And he lost his sight because of the sorrow that he was suppressing.

85. They said: "By Allâh! You will never cease remembering Yusuf until you become weak with old age, or until you be of the dead."

86. He said: "I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allâh, and I know from Allâh that which you know not.

Real-Life Lesson # 22:

In Verse no. 84 we learn that Prophet Yaqub suppressed his sorrow of losing a son by keeping the anger inside of him. What happened as a result?

He became blind.

Don't keep your anger and your frustrations locked up inside.

So whom do I take this anger out on, my wife? My kids?

Well this is what Prophet Yaqub ﷺ did: *"I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allâh."*

Yes complain to Him, He will listen and He will reward. Until then be patient.

87. "O my sons! Go you and enquire about Yusuf and his brother, and never give up hope of Allâh's Mercy. Certainly no one despairs of Allâh's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve."

Real-Life Lesson # 23:

There is a message not only for individuals here, but for us as a nation too. At the level of the individual, even if you find out that your wife has cancer, on the night you learn that you've been fired, you are not to lose hope in Allâh's mercy.

At the level of the nation there is an unmistakable message of immense importance in here. Millions of Muslims worldwide are losing hope daily, millions are hungry and many more homeless, and yet Allâh tells us not to despair of His mercy for those who do are *'people who disbelieve'*. **Remember the real test of Islam is not to believe in the seen, but the Unseen.**

88. Then, when they entered unto him (Yusuf), they said: "O ruler of the land! A hard time has hit us and our family, and we have brought but poor capital, so pay us full measure and be charitable to us. Truly, Allâh does reward the charitable."

89. He said: "Do you know what you did with Yusuf and his brother, when you were ignorant?"

90. They said: "Are you indeed Yusuf?" He said: "I am Yusuf, and this is my brother (Benjamin). Allâh has indeed been gracious to us. Verily, he who fears Allâh with obedience to Him (by abstaining from sins and evil deeds, and by performing righteous good deeds), and is patient, then surely, Allâh makes not the reward of the Muhsinun (good-doers) to be lost."

91. They said: "By Allâh! Indeed Allâh has preferred you above us, and we certainly have been sinners."

Real-Life Lesson # 24:

This is the universal and timeless truth that all Muslims need to be so badly aware of, yet are not—this truth is that Allâh will always prefer the '*Muhsinun*' to the evildoers. So don't despair, and don't be one of the many Muslims who stop practicing Islam because they think that Islam will make them unsuccessful in this life. As we are coming close to concluding the story, I hope you do realize that those who keep their faith in Allâh will always succeed in the end.

92. He said: "No reproach on you this day, may Allâh forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!

Real-Life Lesson # 25:

Even after all that his brothers put him through, Prophet Yusuf forgave his brothers. So please forgive your friends, your relatives, and your neighbors, even at country levels, for nothing that they would have done could be worse than what happened to Prophet Yusuf.

93. "Go with this shirt of mine, and cast it over the face of my father, he will become clear sighted, and bring to me all your family."

94. And when the caravan departed, their father said: "I do indeed feel the smell of Yusuf, if only you think me not a dotard (a person who has weakness of mind because of old age)."

95. They said: "By Allâh! Certainly, you are in your old error."

96. Then, when the bearer of the glad tidings arrived, he cast it (the shirt) over his face, and he became clear-sighted. He said: "Did I not say to you, I know from Allâh that which you know not."

97. They said: "O our father! Ask forgiveness (from Allâh) for our sins, indeed we have been sinners."

98. He said: "I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you, verily He! Only He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful."

99. Then, when they entered unto Yusuf, he betook his parents to himself and said: "Enter Egypt, if Allâh wills, in security."

100. And he raised his parents to the throne and they fell down before him prostrate. And he said: "O my father! This is the interpretation of my dream aforetime! My Lord has made it come true! He was indeed good to me, when He took me out of the prison, and brought you (all here) out of the bedouin life, after Shaitan had sown enmity between me and my brothers. Certainly, my Lord is the Most Courteous and Kind unto whom He will. Truly He! Only He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."

101. "My Lord! You have indeed bestowed on me of the sovereignty, and taught me the interpretation of dreams— the (only) Creator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Wali (Protector, Helper, Supporter, Guardian, etc.) in this world and in the Hereafter, cause me to die as a Muslim (the one submitting to Your Will), and join me with the righteous."

102. This is of the news of the Ghaib (unseen) which We reveal by Inspiration to you (O Muhammad ﷺ). You were not (present) with them when they arranged their plan together, and (also, while) they were plotting.

Comment:

And finally the story ends, and the good guys did win in the end. But they were tested severely, and their faith was shaken several times. But they stood firm, remained patient and asked Allâh for help. And that's how our life's story should also be, if we manage to continue on the straight path. **It's important now that you read more of the translation of the Qur'an in an attempt to learn and understand the lessons present in it as these are a source of Mercy and Divine guidance for all of us.**

The Last Word on Miscellaneous Topics

- Money and Islam: Friends or Foes
- Why?: A Heart-gripping Essay on the State of the Muslim Nation
- Women and Islam: the Truth at last
- The Last Word on being a Muslim in the 21st Century

".....This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion......" (5:3)

Money and Islam: Friends or Foes

> *Allâh increases the provision for whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills), and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter is but a brief passing enjoyment.* (13:26)

Money, money, money, can't live without it and according to some Muslims you can't do anything to earn more of it. Why? And why is this point of view important. Because a massive proportion of Muslim boys and an even greater propotion of Muslim girls have to forgo their education due to this attitude by their parents. And what exactly will you hear their parents tell you, especially if you are the parents of a girl, they will tell you that provision (or *Rizq*) belongs to Allâh and so there is no need to educate a child to earn since whatever he does now will not affect his earnings. Usually these arguments ring aloud in the minds of uneducated parents, but to educated parents these arguments fall on deaf ears. So what does Allâh say about all this, well let me repeat a part of the Verse quoted before:

> *"Allâh increases the provision for whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills)".*

Now what?

Whose wrong, the educated parents or Allâh?

It simply doesn't matter (even though Allâh is right), what's important is that every Muslim child has the right to education regardless of the consequences of education, because without education the Muslim nation as a whole risks its very existence.

The very fact that the Muslim nation finds itself in a situation of complete and absolute despair is a testament to the fact that we are doing something wrong. So what needs to change?

Well for starters **the Muslim nation must realize that successful people and success itself is NOT a consequence of doing something wrong, but in fact a proof that the person is doing something right.**

But all this doesn't help to answer the question of whether or not Islam is for or against wealth and success. Now rewind back to 1400 years ago, how many of you know why the Prophet ﷺ prayed for one of the two 'Umars ('Umar bin Khattab and 'Amr bin Hisham, commonly known as Abu Jahl) to accept Islam?

Because both of them were rich and powerful!

Question: Are Islam and success in life mutually exclusive?

Answer: No.

Question: Does Islam restrict the success of a Muslim?

Answer: Not unless that success somehow restricts the Muslims' faith.

Bottom line:

Islam does not mind, and I would say by the attitude of the Prophet ﷺ that it even encourages a Muslim to be successful in this life, for successful people make a successful nation. Islam only discourages the success of a Muslim in this life when that success is gained through illegitimate means.

Last Word:

In conclusion, Islam and money are best friends at times and sworn enemies at others depending on the situation that you find yourself in. So remember this piece of advice about money as a Muslim:

All money is good money unless that money is hurting your faith in any manner. If your wealth does compromise your faith in any shape or form, then it is better for you to forgo that wealth in order to gain Allâh's pleasure.

Why?: A Heart-gripping Essay on the State of the Muslim Nation

What happened over the past three centuries is that people in general of all faiths became less faithful, Mosques, Churches and Synagogues—all became as empty as each other. As a result however the nation of non-Muslims were raised to the pinnacle of civilization, and on the other hand the Muslim Ummah was thrown into a bottomless pit of despair, hopelessness and abject poverty.

Why?

The Muslim nation seems to be plagued with insurmountable problems. **Why?**

We ask Allâh to bring us out of this mess and we beg Him to tell us why He's doing this. Yet we don't bother to do anything about our problems ourselves, **Why?**

Why didn't our forefathers see this coming? And **why** do our problems seem so unmanageable? Even worse than that (and this is what really hurts) **why** do we seem to believe that things will never change? How is it that I can travel anywhere in this nation of one and a half billion (that's 1000000000 + 500000000) people (I did the number thing because that seems like the only thing we are proud of these days) and find not a single person who is willing to say that he is proud of his nation today.

Thus one does really seem to want to ask the question:

WHY?

Can you believe that the answer to all these 'whys' is the same. And what is this prized answer?

Answer: **The Muslim nation has lost its faith in Allâh and in Islam as a religion. That is why we seem to have been left to live a painful life and an even more painful death.** The proof of this is that we all admit that we were not really good Muslims or properly 'practicing' Muslims and yet we are still all too quick to criticize our religion as the factor that is holding us back from worldly success. We refuse to even consider the notion that the lack of genuine religious practice in our lives could in fact be holding us back from success in this life. **I knew for sure that this was the reason for our pain when the only example I could find to give you to describe the mixture of happy and sad faces on the Day of Judgment, was that of the mixture of happy and sad faces of Muslims after they left the immigration counter in Western embassies.**

Last Word:

Muslims can no longer use the success of the Hereafter as an excuse for failure in this life. Islam is a perfect religion, and if followed perfectly, IT WILL result in perfect nation, PERIOD!

Women and Islam: the Truth at last

This seems to be one of the hottest topics in the news media these days and it is absolutely essential that the Muslim nation be told the truth about women in Islam, because as ill-informed as the West is about Muslim women, most Muslims are even more worse off. So without wasting anymore of your time I'm going to jump right to the common misconceptions about Muslim women.

Common Misconception # 1:

Allâh prefers men over women and that is why Allâh has given men all the rights and women all the responsibilities, i.e., women are second class citizens.

Rebuttal:

> "...And they (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses, etc.) similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect, etc.) to what is reasonable, but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them. And Allâh is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (2:228)

Notice how the word 'similar' is used to describe the rights of the two sexes. And notice the use of the word 'responsibility',

not power, not influence. It is therefore inappropriate to make sweeping statements that claim that Islam considers women to be second class citizens in society.

Common Misconception # 2:

Women will not enter Paradise no matter how noble their deeds are. (This is usually the one that non-Muslims are worried about.)

Rebuttal:

> *"And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a true believer in the Oneness of Allâh (Muslim), such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a Naqira (speck on the back of a date stone), will be done to them."* (4:124)

Some of the Rights of Muslim Women include:

- The right to an education up to any level she desires.
- The right to choosing her husband.
- The right to seek employment.
- The right to own a business/property/wealth.
- The right of inheritance.
- The right to worship Allâh.
- The right to be respected and treated well by her family including her husband.
- The right to divorce and custody of her children.

Last Word:

When most people think of Muslim women, they think of women clad in *Burqas*, always fearful of men and without

any rights of their own. This is a misconception that has arisen and although it would be very interesting to go into details of why and how this misconception has been allowed to become so mainstream, at this point in time, all I can say is that it's important to realize that when you just take a look at one Islamic injunction in isolation without understanding the whole system of life that Islam perpetuates then you often look at things with incomplete knowledge and hence your analysis and your judgment tends to reflect your lack of knowledge about the facts on the ground.

It is essential, therefore, that as a Muslim when you decide to make your own comments about the status of women in Islam, you must thoroughly research and understand all the issues involved rather than simply making comments without understanding and knowing fully the issues at hand because that tends to create confusion and fuels the misconceptions about Muslim women that people in the West have.

The Last Word on being a Muslim in the 21st Century

> "Allâh has promised those among you who believe, and do righteous good deeds, that He will certainly grant them succession to (the present rulers) in the earth, as He granted it to those before them, and that He will grant them the authority to practice their religion, that which He has chosen for them (i.e., Islam). And He will surely give them in exchange a safe security after their fear (provided) they (believers) worship Me and do not associate anything (in worship) with Me. But whoever disbelieved after this, they are the Fasiqun (rebellious, disobedient to Allâh)." (24:55)

As we come to the close of the book, I want to take a look at the challenges that each individual Muslim faces while practicing their religion in the 21st century. **We are part of a generation that was assumed Muslim when we were born and in that lies the reason for the weakness of our faith. Our parents taught us how to be a Muslim but not why.** We were taught how to pray and fast but were never told why we were to do it. **True Islamic faith was never instilled in our hearts to begin with.**

Whose fault was it? Why did it happen? How did it happen? None of these questions matter. What matters is that we must change. **It's important now that we concentrate on developing our faith and increase our knowledge and fear of Allâh so that we can commit acts of obedience and worship and actually enjoy doing them rather than look at them as a burden or a 'chore'.**

Everyday Muslims wake up to a grim reality, all our desires everywhere we want them are available to us at utmost ease. And we wonder how in the world are we not supposed to get tempted by them. I hope I've given you the tools in this book to deal with this grim reality, but then again tools are just worthless pieces of metal unless they are put to some use. So promise yourself today that you will for once not have read a book passively, and that you will take the advice that I have given in this book and put it into practice.

> *We let them enjoy for a little while, then in the end We shall oblige them to (enter) a great torment.* (31:24)

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In the end it all comes down to this one question:

Are you willing to give up everything you desire for the One thing you believe in?

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